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ABSTRACT

This document describes the policies of California State Polytechnic University which severely restrict the number of students who are allowed to enroll as undeclared majors. It explains that only first-time freshmen may enter the university without a major, that transfer students must declare a major upon application, and that undeclared majors are allowed only one academic year in that status before they must declare an academic major or leave the university. It goes on to describe the dilemma of undeclared majors who complete their first year with a grade point average below 2.0, noting that most departments require a minimum of a 2.0 grade point average before a student will be accepted as a change of major. A retention effort for these "negative standing" undeclared majors piloted by the University Advising Centers is described in which selected "negative standing" undeclared majors were allowed to continue at the university beyond their normally-allotted three quarters under the auspices of a controlled group counseling program. Included are a description of the functions of the University Advising Centers, the development of the "Continuation Group" for undeclared majors, impressionistic interpretations of the group, comments from student evaluation of the group project, and a discussion of the coordinators' reactions to the student evaluation. (Author/NB)

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AN OVERVIEW OF

CALIFORNIA STATE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY, POMONA'S

"CONTINUATION GROUP"

OF

UNDECLARED MAJORS

CONDUCTED DURING FALL QUARTER, 1989

PRESENTED TO THE CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION FOR COUNSELING AND DEVELOPMENT

BURLINGAME, CALIFORNIA

FEBRUARY, 1990

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AN OVERVIEW OF

CALIFORNIA STATE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY, POMONA'S

"CONTINUATION GROUP" OF UNDECLARED MAJORS CONDUCTED DURING FALL QUARTER, 1989

AS PRESENTED TO THE
CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION FOR COUNSELING AND DEVELOPMENT

BURLINGAME, CALIFORNIA FEBRUARY, 1990

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona is a taxpayer-supported institution 30 miles east of Los Angeles which enrolls nearly 20,000 students. Historically, the campus has maintained a rigorous attitude towards Undeclared Majors.

The numbers of students who are allowed to enroll as Undeclareds is severely restricted. Only first-time freshmen may enter the University without a major; transfer students must declare a major upon application. Undeclared Majors are allowed only one academic year in that status before they must declare an academic major, or leave the University.

Because some Undeclared Majors complete their first year with grade point averages below 2.0, they experience difficulty declaring new majors. This is because most departments at the University require a minimum of a 2.0 grade point average before a student will be accepted as a change of major.

What follows is a discussion of a retention effort for these "negative standing" Undeclared Majors as piloted by the University Advising Centers (UAC). The UAC allowed selected "negative standing" Undeclared Majors to continue at the University beyond their normally-allotted three quarters under the auspices of a controlled group counseling program. To date, the authors are moderately pleased with the results of this experiment.

INTRODUCTION

The University Advising Centers are the University's Student Services department for Undeclared Majors. In particular, our offices support and implement the University policy that Undeclared Majors must successfully declare their majors during their first three quarters of attendance. The vast majority of our Undeclared Majors in fact comply with this requirement.

A number of Undeclared Majors do not return to the University for their fourth quarters with declared majors. Some of their reasons include:

* they have temporarily "stopped out" of the University;
* they have decided to voluntarily leave the University on a less temporary basis; or
* they have been unable to declare their majors because they are not in good academic standing -- i.e. they are on probation, subject to disqualification, or even disqualified.

It is this last group whom we hoped to affect with this retention proposal.

In the past, the University Advising Centers recognized the fact that some Undeclared Majors were in negative standing at the end of their third quarters -- i.e. they had less than a cumulative 2.0 grade point average. It was the ad hoc practice of the University Advising Centers to informally "carry" some of these students *as individuals* beyond their third quarters. It was the individual counselor's hope that with one or two additional quarters of work on the part of the student, that student would then be able to overcome whatever academic difficulties existed and successfully declare a major.

Although this informal "carryover" approach has worked well for some Undeclared Majors, we believed that there was a better approach to the problem discussed above.

Project: "Continuation Group" Undeclared Major

We formalized the previous "carryover" practice by:

> comprehensively planning for the program; and

> documenting, analyzing, and accounting for its results.

There were several differences between the previous informal "carryover" practice and our more formal program:

I) Selection

This group of "Continuation Group" Undeclared Majors was carefully screened for continuation beyond three quarters by the entire professional staff of the University Advising Centers -- as opposed to the individual judgment of one counselor, as had been the case. Final selection of the students who comprised the academic counseling group was made by the two academic counselors responsible for this program.

II) Academic Counseling Group

Undeclared Majors who were allowed to continue beyond three quarters were expected to participate in the academic counseling group for the duration of their fourth quarters. This academic counseling group was coordinated by two academic counselors from the University Advising Centers, Dr. Marcia Albert and Daniel Aseltine. This weekly group seminar addressed issues such as study skills, academic policies and procedures, personal motivation, self-discovery exercises, academic and career goals, etc.

III) Accountability

This group of students will be "tracked" longitudinally via the retention data base currently being developed for Undeclared Majors by the University Advising Centers. Our objective will be to assess the value and limitations of the academic counseling intervention. Equally important, we will be focussing upon the individual successes and failures of each student-member of the group. One of our means of evaluation will be the case-study approach.

IV) Academic Counseling Emphasis

This Continuation Group of Undeclared Majors had its headquarters changed from University Advising Center #2 in building 95 to University Advising Center #1 in the Administration Building. We hoped that this geographical relocation and the accompanying changes in procedures would impress upon the students the seriousness of their academic situations and the intensity of our efforts to help them.

IMPRESSIONISTIC INTERPRETATIONS

The coordinators agreed that the group developed a relative sense of cohesion, based upon some observed outcomes:

>a pervasive sense of optimism about their academic futures;
>a greater sense of the value of time management;
>a more realistic perspective on the amount of personal effort required to overcome their academic weaknesses;
>a renewed commitment to academic success at the University;
>a greater sense of sophistication in dealing with University's bureaucratic procedures; and,
>an interest in maintaining contact with one another after the end of the program.

The coordinators were pleasantly surprised by several attributes of the group:

First, the students tended to follow through on assignments completely and punctually.

Second, the students responded well to some non-traditional techniques (e.g., audio-taping their responses to exercises, Dr. Richard DeNovellis' Personality Type Preference Indicator, Dr. Joseph Hart's psychological overview of goal-setting, and Dr. Don Morris' presentation regarding self-esteem).

Third, there was no need to threaten any student with administrative disqualification from the University based on non-attendance or low productivity.

Fourth, there was a great deal of informal consultation with us after the workshop sessions;

However, we agreed that there were some disappointments:

First, we observed that the students were universally overly-optimistic about their projected grade point averages and their projected lengths of time before graduation.

Second, as a group, we found them to be less than forthcoming in their interactions with one another; their level of participation was lower than we expected.

Third, the quality of their written work was less than baccalaureate level.

STUDENT EVALUATIONS

At the last meeting of the Continuation Group, the student members were asked to respond to the evaluation form reproduced below, which uses a Likert scale. Tabulated underneath each question is the number of responses generated, mean score for each response, mode score for each response, and narrative samples of written comments.

STUDENT EVALUATION OF CONTINUATION GROUP

BY Daniel Aseltine and Marcia Albert

DIRECTIONS: *This instrument will provide the group leaders with valuable information as to the effectiveness of their program. Please be honest with your responses and comments.* ***DO NOT INCLUDE YOUR NAME.***

Instructors' Preparation and Organization

1. Knowledge of the subject

EXCELLENT		AVERAGE		NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
5	4	3	2	1

n = 10; mean = 4.1; mode = 4

2. Organization and preparation for the Continuation Group

EXCELLENT		AVERAGE		NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
5	4	3	2	1

n = 10; mean = 4.1; mode = 4

3. Written course objectives, requirements, and assignments

EXCELLENT		AVERAGE		NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
5	4	3	2	1

n = 10; mean = 3.9 ; mode = 4

4. Give appropriate and prompt feedback on inventories, papers, and assignments

EXCELLENT		AVERAGE		NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
5	4	3	2	1

n = 10; mean = 4.2; mode = 5

Presentation

1. Present materials clearly and coherently

   EXCELLENT — AVERAGE — NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

   5 4 3 2 1

   n = 10; mean = 4.2; mode = 4

2. Use methods of instruction which are well suited to the objectives of the course and promote effective instruction

   EXCELLENT — AVERAGE — NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

   5 4 3 2 1

   n = 10; mean = 4.0; mode = 4

3. Make assignments which correspond with the Continuation Group's objectives and goals

   EXCELLENT — AVERAGE — NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

   5 4 3 2 1

   n = 10; mean = 3.5; mode = 3

Acceptance of Students' Views

1. Encourage group discussion as appropriate

   EXCELLENT — AVERAGE — NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

   5 4 3 2 1

   n = 10; mean = 4.2; two modes = 4 and 5

2. Provide an atmosphere in which students are encouraged to ask questions

   EXCELLENT — AVERAGE — NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

   5 4 3 2 1

   n = 10; mean = 4.1; two modes = 4 and 5

3. Encourage an atmosphere of openness and trust

   EXCELLENT — AVERAGE — NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

   5 4 3 2 1

   n = 10; mean = 3.9; mode = 4

General Evaluation of Instruction

1. Are available beyond scheduled session time

   EXCELLENT — AVERAGE — NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

   5 4 3 2 1

   n = 10; mean = 4.2; mode = 4

2. In general, my rating of the group leaders is

   EXCELLENT — AVERAGE — NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

   5 4 3 2 1

   n = 10; mean = 4.1; mode = 4

3. In general, my rating of the Continuation Group is

   EXCELLENT — AVERAGE — NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

   5 4 3 2 1

   n = 10; mean = 4.0; mode = 4

Please extend your comments, using the reverse side of this page

Your Comments

Positive Comments _____

_____

_____

_____

Suggested Improvements _____

_____

_____

_____

Respondent #1

The group helped me with my study habits. At times I was not really into going but I did and the subjects discussed were interesting & sometimes fun so it was worthwhile to go. Thanks for your help.

At the beginning, I found some of the work to be boring, it did get better as the quarter went on.

Respondent #2

The Continuation Group helped towards the type of strategies to use to get classes, PTPI evaluation, test strategies, & not to be afraid to ask questions in class.

Respondent #3

Very helpful in explaining and clarifying things.

Could go a little more in detail about what certain majors have to offer - How to get into certain majors. What kind of jobs are related.

Respondent #4

Very helpful, the book "Becoming a Master Student" is an excellent choice.

Need more lab assignments and also more field work assignments. E.G., researching a major assignment, SIGI, & etc.

Respondent #5
This group gave me a second chance which I appreciated. Without the group many students wouldn't have been able to continue at this University.

Respondent #6
I really enjoyed the Continuation Group. It really helped me see what my problems with school were and how I could overcome them and do much better in school. I think that this continuation group should be continued as a program, or even start a program like this during the Winter quarter to help freshmen in bad academic standing so at least they will have time before the three quarter deadline to improves themselves.

Start a program like this during 2nd quarter in attendance.

Respondent #7
It was very nice to learn about time management. I know time management is really important but I didn't know how to start. Thanks for showing us how to start.

I wish we had more time with groups members and get to know each other.

Respondent #8
no comments

Respondent #9
Helped me to continue Cal Poly and decide which route to take in continuing school (transferring to FJC). Taught me how to study properly, and avoid procrastination. I feel that if there was no Continuation Group, I would have not known what to do regarding my attendance at Cal Poly or any other school.

Give more information on how the school deals with change of major, and transfer.

Respondent #10
I was very happy to get the opportunity to stay in school because of this group. This group really made me do better to bring my grades up, because it made me realize that if I did not, I would be booted out of school.

One suggestion that I would give is to do more of the different activities (maybe on tape with feedback from you) from the "Becoming a Master Student" book; and stress its important ideas to be put to use.

COORDINATORS' REACTIONS TO STUDENTS' EVALUATIONS

The coordinators perceive several common threads running through the students' comments:

1. There seemed to be a strong consensus that the meetings should be longer than one hour per week. If the Continuation Group is to be offered again next year, we propose that it meet at least two hours per week.

2. Students seemed to indicate that *Becoming a Master Student* was underutilized. We interpret this suggestion as being linked to the first, and would again suggest that if the Continuation Group were to be offered next year in a two-hour per week format, there would be more opportunity to make fuller use of this nationally-renown text.

3. Some students indicated an interest in a fuller treatment of these topics--

>time management/procrastination
>declaring a major
>test anxiety
>career opportunities.

We concur that these would be valuable topics to discuss if the amount of time with the group were doubled.

4. A few students expressed a desire to increase the opportunities for --

>group interaction/cohesion
>outside activities (i.e. labs, field assignments)

We believe that these would easily be implemented under the proposed two-hour format.